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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Leonard A. Leo, executive vice president of the Federalist Society, was elected chairman of the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), where he currently serves as a commissioner. He will take over the year-long post from Felice Gaer on July 1.

“It’s a privilege to serve as chairman,” said Mr. Leo. “It is my hope that, through the Commission’s continued work, we will help our government spot and address the many challenges facing the freedom of religion around the world. I look forward to working with my fellow commissioners to ensure that this basic human right is recognized as an essential and fully integrated component of any successful U.S. foreign, economic, or national security policy strategy.”

Mr. Leo was appointed to USCIRF by President George W. Bush in 2007. As a commissioner, he has travelled to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Nigeria, Sudan, and Vietnam to assess religious freedom violations in those countries.

Mr. Leo holds degrees from Cornell University and Cornell Law School. His experience with public diplomacy includes having served on delegations to the UN Commission on Human Rights, UNESCO, OSCE, WIPO, and the World Health Organization.

Mr. Leo is a member of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a Catholic knighthood founded in 1050 that today emphasizes medical charity to the ill and disabled. He also serves on a number of charitable and public policy boards, including Ave Maria School of Law and the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast.

“In his two years on the Commission, Leonard Leo has repeatedly manifested his commitment to advancing the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief by his active participation in the work of the Commission, travelling to some of the most difficult places around the world, and advocating in Washington and abroad for stronger U.S. policies,” said Ms. Gaer. “I am grateful he is willing to serve as Chair and provide leadership to the Commission in the coming year. Unfortunately, severe violations of religious freedom remain widespread. The Commission will greatly benefit from the intense concern and conviction that Leonard Leo brings to the subject.”

Michael Cromartie, vice president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and Elizabeth H. Prodromou, professor of International Relations at Boston University, were re-elected to serve in the positions of vice-chair.

“It’s wonderful that Elizabeth Prodromou and Michael Cromartie have agreed to serve again as Vice Chairs, providing the Commission important ongoing knowledge, leadership, and continuity,” said Ms. Gaer.

Also serving on the Commission are Don Argue, chancellor at Northwest University; Imam Talal Y. Eid, founder and director of religious affairs at the Islamic Institute of Boston; Ms. Gaer, director, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights at the American Jewish Committee; Richard D. Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; and Ms. Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom of the Hudson Institute. USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact

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